



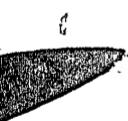
Alweena



A
Christmas
Story

BY
MARY MARKWELL

JOHN A. HART COMPANY
WINNIPEG



With the best wishes

of the Author

Harry Harkness

August, 1921

“AWEENA”



"AWEENA"

“AWEENA”

An Indian Story of a Christmas Tryst
in the Early Days

By

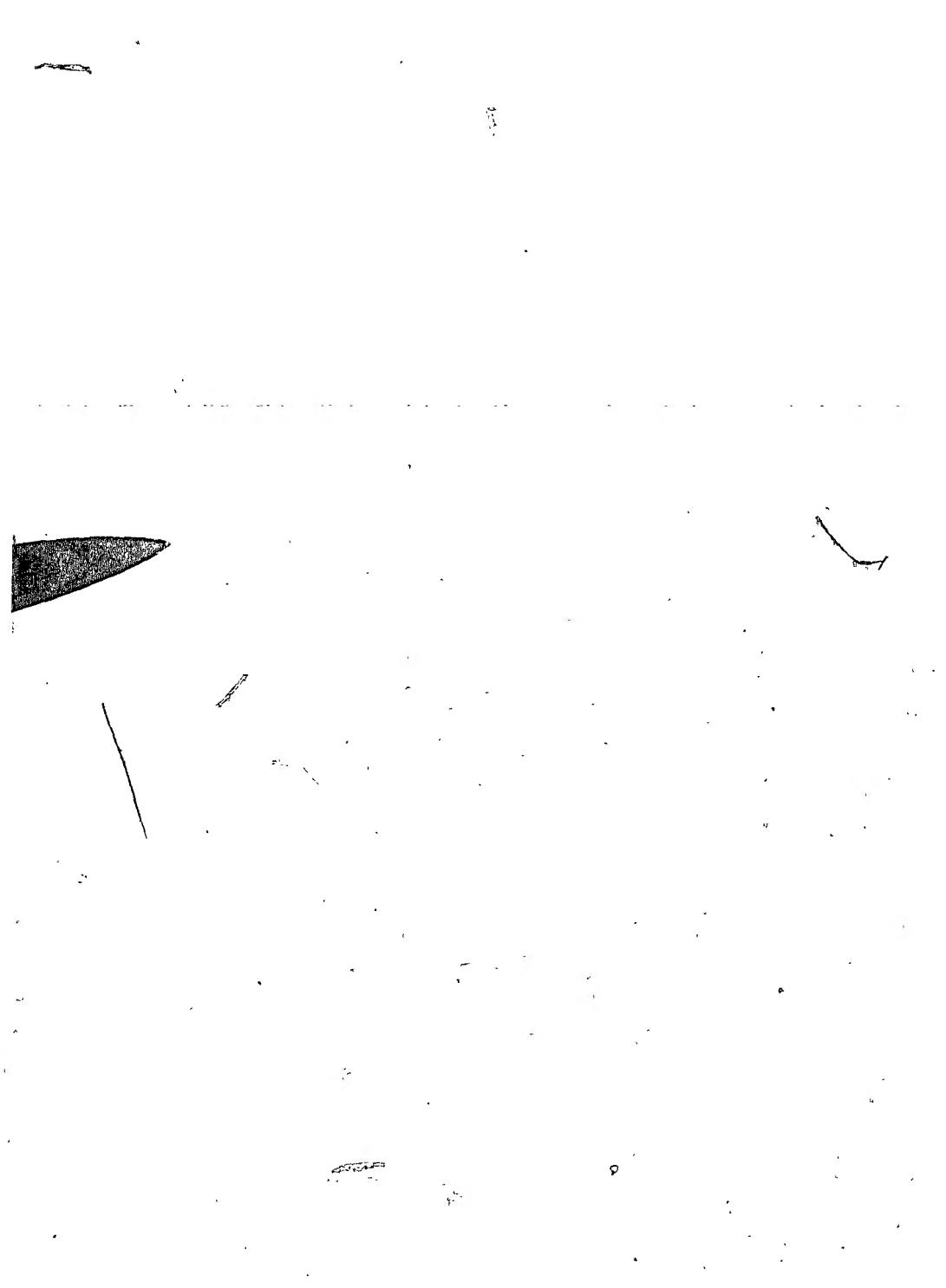
MARY MARKWELL

Illustrations by W. Cotman Eade



Winnipeg
John A. Hart Company
1906





INTRODUCTION



Time is passing. The plains of the last west have become a rushing, roaring river of Trade, and Commerce rides the wave. Shall we not make some effort to record the tales belonging to the earlier, wilder and more splendid days of the unpictured Past?

The panoramic picture is growing dim as the days pass. Figures standing in silhouette are receding from view, and it were well to make some effort, be it ever so faulty, to keep in memory those "children of the plains," whose poetic life in the camp, whose dauntless courage in the battle, whose daring in the



chase, and whose romance and imagery of mind gave to us a land of legend and of song.

Of the old days I attempt this little tale, told me by the banks of the mighty Saskatchewan when the west was young. In attempting to reproduce the tale, I acknowledge my inability to give the story in a form deserving the sadness of its truth, as I admit my incapacity to give its setting the splendor worthy the land of the setting sun.

“ MARY MARKWELL.”

(Kate Simpson Hayes)

Winnipeg, Christmas, 1906.



EXPLANATORY NOTE



Estamao—Tobacco.

Ni-musum—Grandfather.

Ap-sis-Peesim—Little sun, or moon.

Absessoit—Little one.

Neichimous—Sweetheart.

Wei-nepou—She is dead.

Meo-ke-qua-mok—Trading post.

Wap-et-ah-wok—The Elk.

Papoose—Babe.

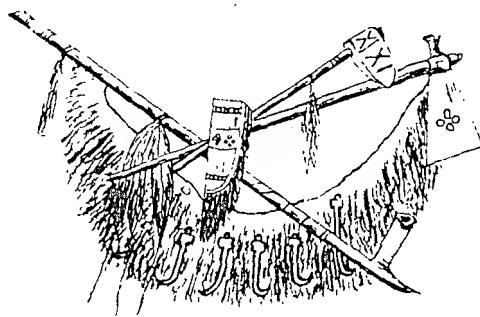
Tepee—Tent.

"Oh-ough"—A cry of grief.

Tom-tom—Musical drum.

Manitou—Great Spirit (God).

Moonias—White man.



“AWEENA”



WEENA, daughter of Macdonald, the Chief Factor, was the beauty of the plains, and there wasn't a young dog in the Hudson's Bay Service or a Red-Coat in the Mounted Police Force but loved her for herself as for her grace and her tawny beauty. The Chief Factor's wife was an Indian woman, and, while the girl Aweena, in feature or form had no trace of white blood, yet she called the Chief Factor Macdonald, “Father”; he, in his hard, cold way, doted on her lithe grace with palpable pride. As for us fellows,



"Gentlemen Adventurers," and Red-Coats, we hated each other as strongly as we one and all loved the beauty of the plains.

It was Christmas time. A time of rejoicing; a time when the eye softened, and the voice thrilled speaking of "home." A time when master and man met together, laughed and drank a good deal, and thought much of loved ones. It was a time when the west was young, and the silence of the great plains was broken only by the crack of the rifle, howl of coyote, or the lash of the stinging north wind. The Police outpost at ——— was a lonesome place to spend Christmas in; I was the sole occupant of the box-like structure, and it was with joy I hailed the arrival of an Indian runner from the Trading Post bearing two messages; one (I opened it first) in the pretty handwriting of my Darling—the other (there

was no mistaking the Captain's wide stroke) an order to go in search of, arrest and bring in to headquarters, a well known and much feared Indian by the queer name of Wap-et-ah-wok; but who answered to the title "Terror of the Plains."

Hamstringing of cattle had been long going on: complaints were coming in from all quarters; all the ranchers and traders uniting in accusation against one vagabond Indian, an old Piegan Chief, with the unpronounceable name Wap-et-ah-wok. The Indian's depredations were more of wanton destruction than any offence against the laws of honesty for hunger's sake. He mutilated the cattle for the mere delight of destroying something belonging to the "moonias." The list of offences against the Indian was a long one. His record was bad. He had served a long term

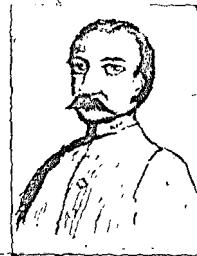


for attempted murder, and, immediately upon his release, had started out to prove his right to the title "A Terror," which made the job laid out for me what one might call a nasty bit of work at Christmas time.

The message of sweet Aweena was much more to my taste than that of my stern Captain; it was an invitation to attend a Christmas ball at the Post, and, with the call, the fine flavor of a promise to keep the "first reel" for me. Heart and hope beat high at this call, and what were seventy miles across country in midwinter with the mercury showing forty below? Nothing, with the promised smile of fair Aweena at its bitter end!

Every white man and woman in the west for two hundred miles had been bidden to the dance. It was the coming-out of the Chief Factor's daughter; she had lately returned

from Scotland, where she had spent four years in a finishing school; and we who had waited, with the beating hearts of youth, had heard of her home-coming with emotions impossible to express. I loved her—but alas! what chance had a poor devil of a non-com. against his Captain—his captain in the regiment—who hated, as Staughton hated me?



Arrived at the Fort I found the place alive with preparations for the entertainment, for the Hudson's Bay officers in those days could show the world what hospitality with a big "H" meant. I half hoped to be asked by Macdonald to stay to the dance, afterwards to take the Indian, whose new deviltry had, no doubt, brought on his unlucky head the wrath of Macdonald. To my grief I found Staughton already there; he had arranged everything, and with malice aforethought had

picked upon me as the one to send out in search of the desperado. This meant two things; my absence from the dance, and the possibility of my death; for the reputation of the Indian outlaw was that of one who would die defying arrest. I arrived to learn that I was to proceed at once in search of the savage.

These heart-breaking things sweet Aweena and I whispered together that night when, for a brief half-hour, we met in the big kitchen where we said good-bye.

"You will come back for the first reel?" she whispered.

"I will be here for the first—or the last dance!" I said; then taking her in my arms I sobbed like a great school boy, "Oh, Aweena, my darling, you won't let that man steal you from me, will you?"

"I won't marry Captain Staughton," she said. Her dear face lay close to my own for a little moment—our hands were clasped, lips meeting in a last farewell, when a bellowing voice sounded:—

"What in the devil is the meaning of this?"

Staughton was standing in the doorway, his hands on his riding whip, the jealous hatred in his eye, showing red. Before I could utter a word he roared at me: "Off to duty this instant, scoundrel, and if you come back without that red devil, dead or alive—back you'll go to the ranks!"

"Bring the Indian back dead — and Aweena is yours!" This the last order of the Chief Factor, hissed in my ear, as I mounted my horse and set out that same night for the Hills, fully a hundred miles away. I

had been ordered out of the way by Captain Staughton, that was quite plain. I was to bring back the dead carcase of the Indian, that, equally plain, was the Chief Factor's order.

I only half understood the enmity between the Chief Factor and the crazed Indian; but orders were orders, and there was but one thing to do—aye, two things would I accomplish: I would find the savage, and I would be back at the Fort in time for the Christmas dance—and Aweena.

I rode all that night without pausing for rest, bite or sup. The delay of a single hour in the work of capture might lose me the promised dance. That, and the joy of leading the Factor's daughter down the floor in Sir Rozer—Staughton looking on—was something worth a hard ride. But there was

work to be done ere this hope could be fulfilled, and—the savage would not be taken alive, it had been said.

Sparkled the white plains under early morning sun; tree and branch, bending under weight of newly fallen snows; shone and glittered the white waste with diamond dews in iridescent gleamings, while here and there ran faint tracings of fleeing squirrel and ermine-white rabbit, as they sped to safety before my horse's hoofs. Tamed by the magic of a December chinook, the North wind crooned a low lullaby; and where the soft snows melted on the trail, the tufted grasses made en-purpled shadows along the illimitable waste of white, white snows. I had gone some fifty miles ere I or my horse broke fast. Then on again. It was sundown when I reached the rising ground described as the possible hiding

place of the Indian. I dismounted, tethered my horse, prepared (but did not light) the camp-fire, and cautiously made my way to the ridge of the hill, whence I could look down upon and scan the entire valley lying below. It was dark down there in the heart of the bluff, so dark that at first I took the form of a man, standing amongst the fir trees and swaying to and fro with the shadowy branches, to be a part of inanimate nature. While I gazed, a harsh cry broke on my ear, and the prostrate form, motionless a moment before, lifted itself in a convulsive way, a snake-like gliding and writhing motion followed, then a wild leap into air, and the gleaming steel of a murderous looking knife buried itself into the ground as the body rebounded to the earth each time. Again and yet again the knife sought the ground, and at

each stroke a wild cry of exultant joy fell on the ear, a last and most venomous thrust causing the blade to break off short, leaving the heft in the man's hand. It was then, in the dim light I saw the full meaning of the action: for outlined on the snowy ground and directly beneath the savage I observed outlined there a human grave. Springing to his feet once more, the savage uttered a most blood-curdling yell as, whirling an upraised arm above his head once, twice, thrice, he sent the knife-handle flying through space. Then the form seemed to collapse; the creature fell prostrate to earth once more and the wild outpouring of grief which followed almost moved my heart to tears. Clearly it was time to act. Stealthily I crept to the very edge of the height —stealthily creeping on hands and knees



down the decline. Soundless as was my approach he seemed to scent my coming.

I saw the savage head lift itself and a pair of deep-set eyes, wolfish in expression, were fixed on the spot where I stood. The expression of that face was one to draw pity rather than to terrify, and some strange resolve made me step out into the open, show myself to the prostrate man, and take the consequence, whatever that might be. "Come, Wap-et-ah-wok," I said quietly, "we will talk by the fire."

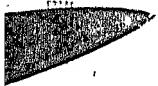
Wap-et-ah-wok, in his youth, must have looked a perfect specimen of manhood. There was yet, in his shrunken form, some remnant of a sinewy suppleness, a subdued strength that pictured the man a giant in his day. Alas! Wap-et-ah-wok was now but the wraith, the shadow of the great Piegan Chief. In the fire-

light, his face was shrunken parchment; crouching over the fire his attitude that of a mighty oak, struck down, not by the hand of Time, but by some fierce, o'ermastering blast, which had bent and defaced but could not utterly destroy. His voice was weak and quavering, but that was when he begged a little more estamoe. I was seated opposite to him, and I saw his eyes were fixed upon the moon, following her course with furtive watchfulness, and while he looked he forgot to draw from the pipe.

"Wap-et-ah-wok," I said, "what are you doing here?"

His voice was soft and gentle as a child's as he answered: "I have come again because it is the time!"

"Two-and-twenty times have the buffalo gone back to the snow lands, two-and-twenty



times have the buffalo come back to the waters
—two-and-twenty times has the musk-rat
made her house by the river—two-and-twenty
times have the snows danced over the hills,
and melted into rivers of tears—tears for the
great Piegan Chief, Wap-et-ah-wok!"

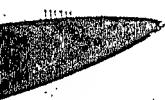
He ceased. A stray cloud passed across
the face of the moon, causing a shadow to
fall upon the plains; it encompassed us about,
making the place and hour more dull and
lonely. The howl of a wolf sounded. Snows,
leaf-heaped, rustled, as though unseen forms
glided by: it was night awakening to hear the
old Indian's tale.

"A-aaha!" he said, rousing to speech as
the cloud passed, "that was a long time ago
—a long time ago. Perhaps I dream those
things—who can say?"

I did not speak. I knew that the old sav-

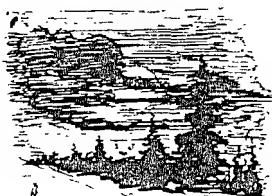


Wap-et-ah-wok tells his story



age would tell his story in his own, broken way, and in his own time; so, as the lone night grew into gray dawn, we sat there, sometimes he spoke—sometimes he was silent, but the broken narrative of the terrible tale went on, and on, and ever on. There was something in the recital that held, enthralled me; and even the memory of my promise to my Dear became a secondary thought.

“Aweena was the Moonlight—she was the star, and Ni-musum would say”—“Her eyes are the light—Her voice is the bird-song. And the Light was mine—the Bird-song was mine.” The Indian relapsed into silence, and I observed that the moon had again become obscured; I thought that when the light clouds now dimming its radiance had passed, he would resume his story; I was right: again the silvery flood fell, and again



his lips were moving. This time he whispered breathlessly, "She watches—She watches!"

"Who watches?" I asked.

"Apsis-peesim," he repeated simply, "She is there!"

The face of the savage was lifted. A rapt expression, an expression of beatified ecstasy, passed over his swarthy features;—his hands, claw-like, had met together over his bared bosom—he leaned forward in a posture of reverential awe for a long time, his lips murmuring one name over and over again, and, hearing that name, repeated, the interpretation flashed upon me; the name Aweena (signifying born-far-away) was a common enough one among the tribes, but this Aweena of his foolish dreams was some dead love, and to his untutored mind the moon was her spirit.

" She was mine," he was saying in a sibilant whisper,—" she was mine. She held our child to her bosom--she called the babe Abessessoit, and Abessessoit was to her as the leaf to the branch—as the clover to the Bee. " Oh-ough!" —he broke in a wild cry, as, lifting up both arms to the moon, now clouded heavily, he sighed brokenly, — " Awecna, niechimoos "!

His face had suddenly become so wolfish in expression that my hand sought the revolver at my belt; but some great pity overcame fear and stayed my hand. His age, his helplessness, his sorrow; his skeleton form compared with my own strength and youth. I could not feel cowardice in the presence of a senile, tottering old man whose trembling feet almost touched Eternity's shore. I felt shame to make captive in his captivity of grief, one

who, in his day had been a great Chief—a brave warrior; one whose name had once caused the plains to tremble; but whose power and strength were now as a burnt-out volcano, spiritless and cold. My mind thus occupied, lost some of the old man's narrative. Suddenly I heard him speaking:

“When the papoose came my Bird-song was mute. Ni-musum spoke: ‘She will fade as the rose fades when summer is done’; he said; and, my son, the red rose had turned to the white leaf upon the face of my Beloved. I spoke to Ni-musum: ‘I will go to the white Medicine Man—he will make her well. The white Medicine Man is great,’ I said. But Ni-musum had lived long—he was wise. He spoke: ‘When the sun is hot, it looks upon the pure snow and the snows melt. The breath of the white Medicine Man is as the

hot sun. Aweena is the pure snow—have you no eyes? ' Ni-musum said. But though I had eyes I was as the Bat. It was many days to the Meo-ke-qua-mok—this is the spot—it was many days from the tepee of Wap-et-ah-wok, where the stars talk all day long to the hills—where the buffalo drinks from the great waters. It was many days, but I carried my Beloved and we went along the trail. Ni-musum was old, my son, but he feared and he followed after. Abessessoit was upon the bent back of Ni-musum, for the arms of Aweena were as the twigs when the sap is dry, her face was as the snows and her breath as the wind that is spent. I snared the bird and gave it's blood to the babe, for I said—the roe must not devour the fish, and Aweena gave suck to papoose no more. Then, my son, the babe sickened, and the



heart of Aweena was as the nest when it is robbed of its young!"



The fire had burnt itself out. I felt the chill of the December night, but the bared and painted form of the old Indian showed no sign of feeling the winter wind. He sat erect. His form seemed to gather strength as he spoke; his voice grew fuller, louder, stronger; it was the expiring flame of life's vital fires, fed into remembrance and fanned by hate! He went on rapidly:—

"I brought her to the white Medicine Man. He looked at my Beloved. He spoke with forked tongue: 'The evil (sickness) is here,' he said (the Indian touched his heart), but Ni-musum had lived long—he knew. Ni-musum whispered to me: 'Have you no eyes? The "evil" is in the heart of the white Medicine Man!' But, my son, I was as the Bat.

The white Medicine Man said, 'If I had the heart of the unborn beaver I would make her well again.' Oh, my son, at this my heart bounded like the eagle. I said, 'I will tear from the bowels of the beaver its unborn. I will tear from the heart of the beaver its young!' And, though Ni-musum screamed to me to come back, I did not listen. I ran far into the night—I ran seeking the thing with young, and when I found it I tore from the living dam the reeking young, its heart beating with undiscovered life! But, my son," he added brokenly, "when I came again to where my Beloved lay, lo! it was to find her lying as the tree lies when it has felt the tooth of the axe; and, my son, she did not speak again! I cried aloud—I beat the earth—I cried to the great Manitou, but He did not hear my voice. I

called to Her, but she answered not—her lips were as the frozen lake, cold, still, silent!"

"I sat by my beloved and watched until the stars came out and went down again. Ni-musum was old, he slept, but sleep had gone from my eyes forever. I sat by my Beloved until the stars came up again. I was athirst from tears spent, and the white Medicine Man came and he gave me to drink, and my eyes grew heavy—and I forgot to watch forever! When the sun came up I awoke, and lo! my Beloved was gone and the world was empty! I called out to my Beloved—I would follow where she went—but the white Medicine Man spoke, and his tongue was forked like the snake; he said, 'Wei-nepou! would you break h'r sleep? She suffers no more,' he said; and, my son, he took me to the place where she slept—it was earth—heaped, and

he spoke: ' She sleeps, would you wake her to sorrow? ' "

" I fell on my face and I kissed the place where she lay—I put my face to the ground and called her name—called soft as when winds are small—for I would not break her rest. I said to the ground: ' Keep her warm —hold her close—and I will watch here forever! '

" While I watched, the white Medicine Man came. He spoke: ' Wap-et-ah-wok,' he said, ' the buffalo steps are heard in the north like thunder—the silver fox has left her lair—the lynx laughs because the snare is no more set, and the wolf wanders everywhere. The musk-rat builds her house on the water's edge, and is no more afraid—the winds call angrily to the mountains far away—and the snows are stealing over the world. Soon the

rivers will be locked. Assiniboine, and Cree, and Blackfeet, and Blood meet together and ask: "Where is Wap-et-ah-wok? Where is the Piégan? Is he afraid to come forth?"

"Then I heard the voice of the winds, but the laugh of the Assiniboine, and the Blackfeet, and the Cree, and the Blood was louder still; and my blood grew hot—I rose up and I went along the trail, for was I not the Piégan Chief?" Mournfully he went on: "The waters had cut away the grass, and the trees lay in the trail, and the branches wept in the sun. The flowers were sad and would not look up—the storm had passed over the face of the earth and all was desolation!"

I felt that the tale was nearing its climax, and intuitively my hand moved to where the pistol lay sheathed:

"Oh-ough!" he broke out wildly, "I see

the trail before me now—brown and green—
striped like the snake. Water—pools it had—
—eyes that watched me. Red berries it had—
—tongues thrust at me—and the sun burnt;
my son, burnt as does the mind when it has
sorrow. At last I found them: Cree, and
Blood and Assiniboine, and Blackfeet. They
were gathered in the great Circle and would
show their strength in the Dance. And the
music of the Tom-tom made my feet to leap
as the hare. Was I not still Piegan Chief?
I stepped in the Circle. The Tom-tom sounded,
and the Dance began. When I looked I
saw the face of the white Medicine Man and
his face went white like the snows. But he
smiled—smiled as does the dog when the
whip of the master falls on his back. He
spoke to Cree, and Blackfeet, and Assiniboine,
and Blood: You are all bravé—you



are all strong—you are all great Chiefs—but one there is who is braver, greater, stronger than any here!" And everyone cried out:

"Who is greater than any here?" And the white Medicine Man spoke, "Wap-é-tah-wok, the Piégan Chief, is the bravest here! Hoh! my son, that made the blood leap in my veins—my heart grew big like the mountain—my arms grew strong like the oak—I felt pride like a river rise within me—it rose here, here!" (He struck at his heart). "The pride grew," he shouted, "grew like the lake in storm; and Blood, and Cree, and Blackfeet, and Assinibaine looked at me with dark faces—they spoke together and they hated me for I was Piegan Chief, bravest there; had he not said it?"

"The voice of the white Medicine Man was like thunder in the valley as he spoke"

Wap-et-ah-wok is brave—he is bravest of all!"

"I heard the words, my son, and my veins ran like rivers, and my blood ran like fire. I stood out in the Circle." He rose as he spoke, suiting action to word, "And I cried to them to bring whip and thong!"

The blanket had fallen from him. His bent and shrivelled form seemed to waken to renewed life, youth, and vigor. Sinews long dead and bones long rusted; blood long slumbering, and slow of action, rose in flood-tide as if in answer to the war-cry of his race. I too arose, awed, terrified by the suddenly awakened grandeur of the man.

"Oh-ough!" he broke out wildly, "I was brave—had he not said it? I danced until the night came down and lifted again and it was day. I danced till the stars came out and

looked on me with wonder; for Assiniboine had crept away, and Cree Brave had fainted in his heart, like a woman; and the Blood cried out and died; and he was in the Dance no more—but I danced on! I was faint with thirst, for I had not drunk for five suns; I saw the moon come out and look down upon me, and I was thirsty no more—and danced on! I said, ‘She will look down from the Spirit world—she will see me here—she will know me the bravest—and she will be glad.’ And I danced on! When I looked again, my son, it was not the moon I saw—it was the face of my beloved—and Manitou!” (this in a shrill scream): “she lived—and SHE WAS THERE! It was her face—her eyes. They were dull, like the eyes of the fish when the spear is in its body; but it was her face—warm with life and white with

fear! I threw my body against the bonds, but they held me; and the thongs stretched until they cried out—until the flesh cried out and broke away, and the sweat and blood were as rivers on my brow. I called her name aloud—she heard—but the poplar broke away, “for the flesh had conquered!” I lay as one dead, and the white Medicine Man spoke. He said: ‘Fool; he is dead; take the dog away; gives his bones to the wolves to fatten on!’ I was as one dead; but through the sweat and blood that blinded me I saw his eyes laugh—laugh as laughs the wolf when it sucks the blood of the mountain lamb. I was as one dead; but I would look in his face again; for had he not called me dog? Then I saw Her coming—her arms outstretched to me—but his arms held her, as the lasso holds the deer, as the snare holds

the bird. I was as one dead—but that sight brought back life. I was on my feet as the wind leaps. I struck as the lightning strikes. I did not know that the knife was in my hand. I only knew that he held her from me—that she lived—that she was mine—that he had lied to me! My son, he held her—but MY HEART LAUGHED, FOR MY KNIFE WAS IN HIS BACK!"

The fearful words, re-echoing in my horrified ears, took on some new meaning. "MY HEART LAUGHED, FOR THE KNIFE WAS IN HIS BACK!" The Chief Factor had once been stabbed in the back by an Indian he had wronged. The terrible truth now flashed before my mental vision. The Chief Factor hated the Indian, Wap-et-ah-wok—he desired the death of the savage—and the savage hated the Chief Fac-

tor. Wap-et-ah-wok thought he had killed him in that death-dealing blow, and had become a wanderer and an outcast on the face of the earth. The woman at the Fort—the woman who never smiled—wife of Macdonald—was Aweena, the mother of my darling, and I now knew she was the Aweena of the old Indian's dreams!

There were now but four-and-twenty hours to reach the Fort—full ninety miles lay an impossible stretch between. Wrong enough had been done. Aweena the child must be saved from the fate of Aweena the mother. I would save her from marriage with Captain Staughton—a hated tie and a loveless life.

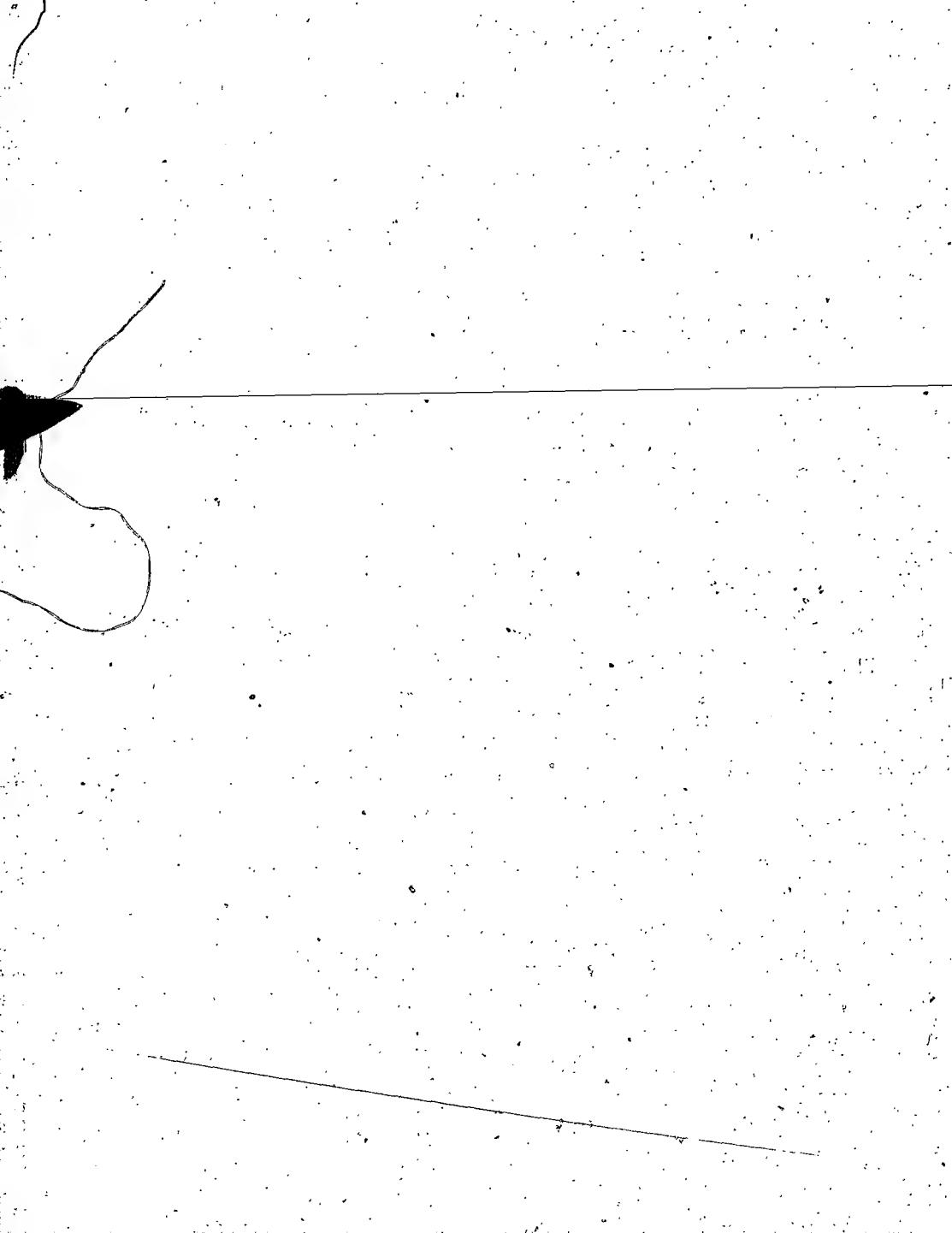
I passed the pipe over to the old Indian, and when he had drawn strength from its red ashes, drew the stem across my lips. This

the bond of amity betwixt us. We were no longer captive and a captor—the relationship had altered—we were friends to the death!

I suddenly became aware of a change in the weather; a fine mist thickened the air, and a threatening darkening of the sky urged quick departure. There was but one horse between us. The Indian, long fasting and worn by emotions, showed exhaustion in every limb; to mount myself and drag him afoot beside me was out of the question. To allow him to mount was equally impossible—the devil of defiance was aroused in him, and he might, once mounted, throw rein to the winds and off across country. It meant a march, a slow march across that widening, blinding, snow-heaped waste; and, maddening thought, Staughton, a determined suitor,



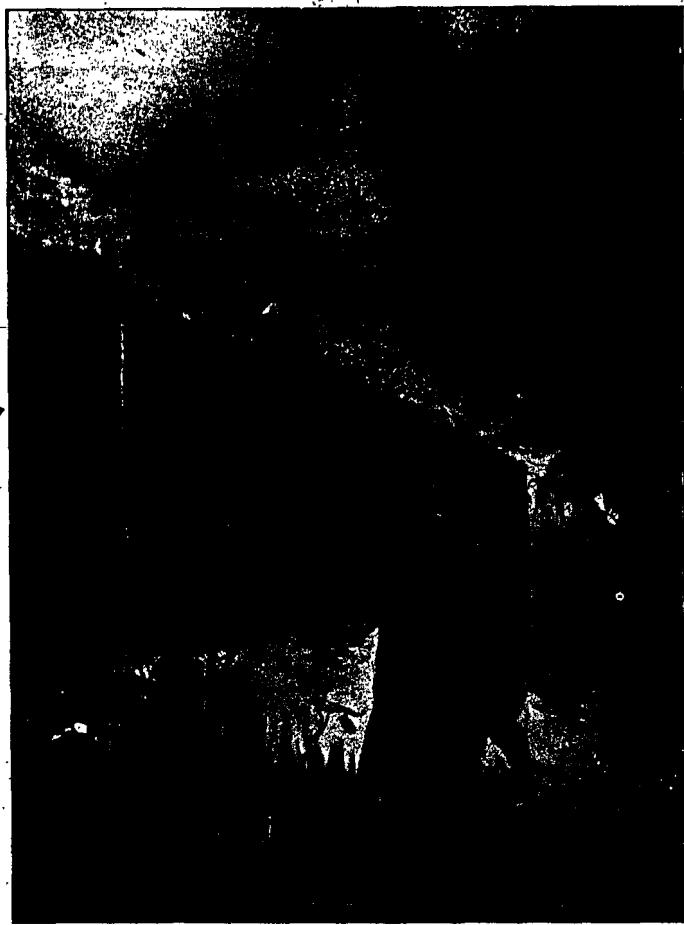
A fine mist thickened the air



leading my darling down the room in a Christmas dance! Into my brain shot a wild hope. "Wap-et-ah-wok," I cried; "a great storm is coming. At the Meo-ke-quamok there is a great feast. There the face of Aweena smiles. If you show me a short-cut to the place I will show you the face of your Birdsong—I will let you hear her speak—she shall touch your hands—Aweena, the Moonlight, is there!" I pointed to the north. The Indian stared at me a moment, madness alight in his red eyes. "She is there!" I repeated. He sent out a wild shout, a shout that was half hate, half despair; and with a strength and force I little dreamed him capable of, threw me bodily into the saddle, and, leaping to the horse's neck, with a maddened cry we swept off and away in the teeth of the gathering storm.



Of that wild ride through what seemed never-ending day I am still vaguely conscious. The way was new to me. Over hills and through valleys; past coulees and by haunt of wild beast; never pausing, never hesitating, never moving from one straight, unswerving line to the north, until I became fearful that we were, man and beast, at the mercy of a maniac. A terrific wind drove us forward, and a muggy, sunless day grew into darkened night. Where we were I knew not. I gave up all hope of reaching the Fort that night. Once, yea twice, the horrible suggestion came to me to kill the maniac as we rode—to put a bullet in his back as, screaming his pent passions, we swept onwards in that trackless way. Nothing kept me from carrying out what seemed my only plan of escape but the memory of a yellow stripe on



Before us in the darkness loomed the great gates of the Trading Post

my jacket sleeve. I wore the Queen's colors, and I would wear them worthily when I met my darling again, or I would lose them both in duty's service!

That instant I was flung to the ground, as the exhausted animal, thrown back upon his haunches, fell a quivering, foam and blood-flecked mass, without power to even lift his head. Before us in the darkness loomed the great gates of the Trading Post. The place was aglow with light and the air was alive with laughter and song, as I pounded on the bars, calling loudly, "Open gates! Open gates!" But the call was unheard. The guests were drinking spiced wines, or those who had already drunk too heavily were sleeping off the effects. The bellow of the storm seemed to be an elemental cry from the world unknown, and the crashing of break-

ing branches about me sounded like human
hurts expressed! The log walls of the Fort
ribbed darkly against the sky, and at the rear
I found entrance: In the great, spacious
kitchen, neglected candles burned ghost-like
on the walls; a yawning fireplace sent out a
welcoming warmth, but it failed to thaw the
chill in my heart, for I heard the abominable
voice of Staughton bawling out: "A toast!
A toast to fair Aweena—to-morrow's bride!"

I stood before the blaze sweating with fear
and trembling like a wet hound. The Indian, thoroughly exhausted; half squatted,
half lay in front of the fire, his eyes hungrily
devouring a fat fowl spitting its juices into the
red coals—set there, no doubt, to fill some
over-fed retainer's belly. I tore the bird from
the hook and threw it to the savage. Hunger
made him attack it fiercely, flesh and

bone; so would he have attacked the flesh of the home-destroyer, had he but known.

Of a sudden the hinge of a door creaked, a single sigh sounded, ending in a hysterical laugh—and the next instant my darling was in my arms, her eyes shining with a great and a wondering joy and astonishment.

“A—wee—na—Nie—chi—mous!”

The wild cry of the Indian seemed to pierce the heavens above and to reach the very depths of hell beneath.

“What in damnation——?”

In the doorway stood the Chief Factor, his eyes bulging with rage and drink; his face livid; his features contracting with some sudden and unexpressed fear. The question ended a soundless word on his shaking lip. Behind him, swaggering forth as steadily as a pair of drunken legs would let him, came

Staughton, grinning horribly, while guests and servants crowded around, asking, wondering.

Macdonald caught the warning look in my eye. He said hoarsely to the crowding guests: "Go!" Much bewildered, they went away to cackle over the strange happening; but Aweena, the wife of Macdonald, remained. She stood, some horrible fascination of fancy holding her eye to that senseless form upon the floor; her swarthy face, whitening, like snows falling against the night. Her eyes were on the form of the savage, but the question was to Macdonald:

"Who is this—man?"

"Go to your guests!" was his answer.

The Indian stirred—drew a short, gasping breath—opened his eyes and looked full in the face of the woman. Recognition was mutual, instantaneous. He bounded to his

feet, his swaying body throwing forward, as the woman's arms opened. A double cry rang through the raftered walls, a strange cry in some half forgotten tongue, as they rushed each to other. But again Macdonald stood between them! Darting past the Chief Factor, the woman, Aweena, threw herself into the arms of Wap-et-ah-Wok, her head nestling on his bosom, whence she had been torn two and twenty years before.

Macdonald stood as if petrified. The old, authoritative air dropped from him as a blanket. In his naked character he stood, looking on the man he had wronged and the woman he had betrayed so bitterly, so treacherously, so damnable—and Nemesis, looking on, laughed loud and long!

“ My—sin—has—found—me—out!”

Slowly the words dropped from his quivering lips.

"Aweena—Neich-i-mous!" The old savage breathed the words softly, tenderly, solemnly, sweet. His form seemed to collapse suddenly, and he sank to the floor, supported by the woman's arms, whose fingers touched his bared and emaciated body with trembling and with loving care. Eyes looked into eyes—the blanched face of the woman bending over the sharpening features of the dying man; one word only sobbed between them—"Nei-che-mous!"—the old love-call of that earlier, gladder day. And with that tender sigh the soul of Wap-et-ah-wok went out on the wings of the storm.

"Mother!" The call came from my darling, who had crept back to ask what was so strange, and what was happening?

Macdonald roused at the sound of her voice. He went to where she stood, bewildered, hesitating; and taking her hand led her into that strange circle. "Aweena," he said, "mistakes have been made and lives have been blighted since Time began. Your young life is just beginning, and it shall not be shadowed by any act of mine. Child!" he cried; "Captain Staughton gained my promise to-night to give you in marriage to-morrow. This beggarly red-coat dares to ask the same gift. Let your woman's heart speak, Aweena—speak for time and eternity; for in life, in death, there is no such bitter Gethsemane, man and woman may walk together bound, as in that thorn-edged way, an unloved marriage!"

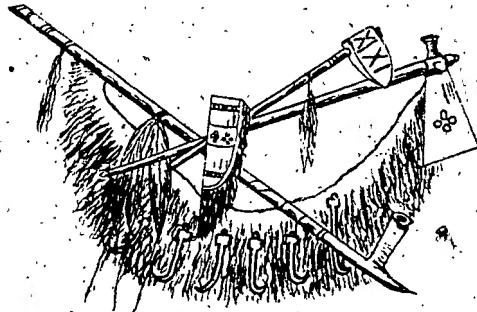
And my darling, coming to me, shyly,
where I stood, a beggar in my spurs, placed
her little hand in mine and stood weeping
there, beside me for answer.

You may be sure the Christmas cheer had,
in the day which followed, some ringing note
of sadness. The death of the Indian was
nothing to grieve about—were there not
many? What is one Indian more or less in
the world? Youth—and wine—soon for-
gets! And next evening we were treading
the light measure again in Sir Roger de Cov-
erly, vis-a-vis with Captain Staughton, who,
learning the astonishing facts of my future
happiness, gave me his hand in congratula-
tion (more or less earnest), saying: "Nor-
man, that was a neat job done yesterday—a
devilish neat job. I shall see to it, my lad,

that the Commissioner hears how well you carried out my instructions!"

What happened afterwards is another story.





1117
y'all
Victoria BC

From the Presses of
The Manitoba Free Press Printing Department
Winnipeg, Canada